

POWDER COCAINE⁺

Three *Pulse Check* sources list powder cocaine as the drug contributing to the most serious consequences: in Boston^L, Denver^E, and El Paso^M. One source in El Paso^N names powder cocaine as the most widely used drug.

Compared with the last reporting period, only a few changes occurred: methamphetamine replaced powder cocaine as the drug contributing to the most serious consequences in

Denver^L, and marijuana replaced powder cocaine in Seattle^N. In El Paso^M, heroin replaced powder cocaine as the most widely used drug. In Miami^E, powder and crack cocaine replaced heroin as the drugs contributing to the most serious consequences—consequences propelled by the combination of these drugs with heroin or other opiates. Finally, in Sioux Falls^{E,N}, powder cocaine is emerging as a new drug problem in spring 2002.

POWDER COCAINE: THE DRUG

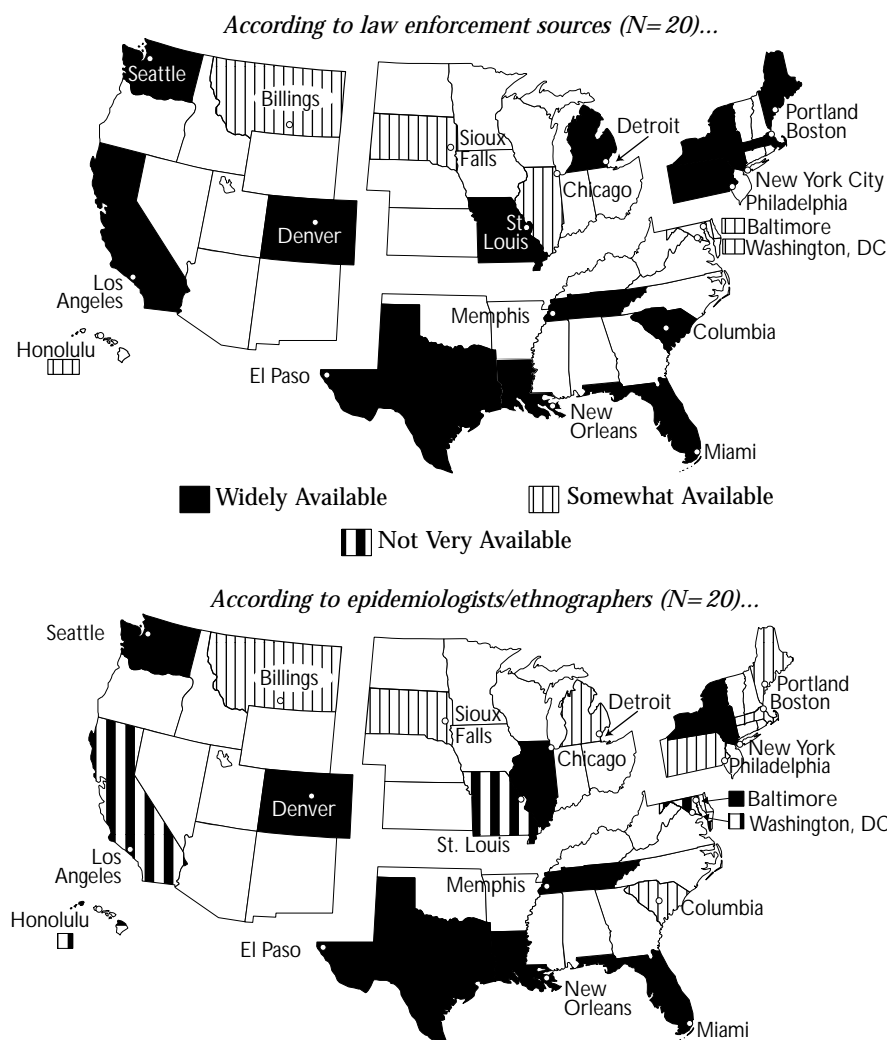
How available is powder cocaine across the country? (*Exhibits 1 and 2*) As reported in the past *Pulse Check*, more than half (23 of 40) of law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources consider powder cocaine widely available in their communities, with no regional patterns. The remaining sources describe it as “somewhat available,” with four exceptions: epidemiologic sources in

Exhibit 1.

How available is powder cocaine across the 20 *Pulse Check* cities (spring 2002)?

Exhibit 2.

How has powder cocaine availability changed (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)?



Memphis, TN^L
New York, NY^E
Portland, ME^L
Sioux Falls, SD^E

Baltimore, MD^{L,E}
Billings, MT^{L,E}
Boston, MA^{L,E}
Chicago, IL^{L,E}
Columbia, SC^{L,E}
Denver, CO^{L,E}
Detroit, MI^{L,E}
El Paso, TX^{L,E}
Honolulu, HI^L
Los Angeles, CA^{L,E}
Memphis, TN^E
Miami, FL^{L,E}
New Orleans, LA^{L,E}
New York, NY^L
Philadelphia, PA^E
Portland, ME^E
Seattle, WA^{L,E}
Sioux Falls, SD^L
St. Louis, MO^{L,E}
Washington, DC^{L,E}

Honolulu, HI^E
Philadelphia, PA^L

⁺The following symbols appear throughout this chapter to indicate type of respondent: ^LLaw enforcement respondent, ^EEpidemiologic/ethnographic respondent, ^NNon-methadone treatment respondent, and ^MMethadone treatment respondent.



POWDER COCAINE

Honolulu, Los Angeles, St. Louis, and Washington, DC, describe it as “not very available.”

According to the majority of law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources, powder cocaine availability remained stable between fall 2001 and spring 2002, with declines in two cities and increases in four.

What are powder cocaine prices and purity levels across the country? (*Exhibit 3*) Cocaine purity varies widely across *Pulse Check* cities: from 40 to 80 percent in the Northeast and from 50 to 90 percent in the West. Only one source each in the South and Midwest report purity, and no changes in purity levels are reported since fall 2001. New powder

cocaine adulterants are reported only in Memphis: the epidemiologic source reports quinine as a new adulterant this reporting period, and the law enforcement source in that city reports traces of heroin in crack and powder cocaine (as reported in the *Crack Cocaine* section).

Prices also vary widely across *Pulse Check* cities, with most gram prices hovering around \$100. Since the last *Pulse Check*, prices declined slightly in Boston and Los Angeles.

How is powder cocaine referred to and packaged across the country? (*Exhibit 4*) In all U.S. regions powder cocaine remains known as “blow,” “coke,” or “powder,” but other slang terms often vary by region.

Sources report few new names in spring 2002, including “aspirin” in the South and “snort” in the Midwest. In Boston, when dealers discuss sales over cell phones, they use feminine names, such as “girl” or “sister,” as code words to disguise the topic of their conversations.

Like heroin and crack, street-level powder cocaine is most commonly packaged in plastic, cellophane, glassine, and zipper bags. It is also commonly folded in paper (“pony packs,” “papers,” “triple folds,” “diamond folds,” “whites,” and “bindles”), as reported in Denver, Detroit, El Paso, Los Angeles, Memphis, Portland (ME), St. Louis, and Seattle. Other less common packaging includes aluminum foil and dollar bills in New York, capsules in Baltimore, cigarette packs and vials in Memphis, aluminum foil in New Orleans, balloons in El Paso, and plastic bags with logos to indicate dealers in Miami—the only city where labeling is mentioned this reporting period. Law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic respondents report no changes in packaging since fall 2001.

POWDER COCAINE: THE MARKET

Who sells street-level powder cocaine? Law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources identify powder cocaine sellers as independent twice as often as they identify them as organized. In many cities (Boston^E, Chicago^L, El Paso^L, Los Angeles^L, Memphis^E, Philadelphia^L, and Portland [ME]^L) independent and organized structures are equally common. In Seattle^L two types of powder cocaine sellers exist: “go-betweens” who are addicts and serve as liaisons between buyers and “the guy in the car,” who supplies the drug and does

Exhibit 3.

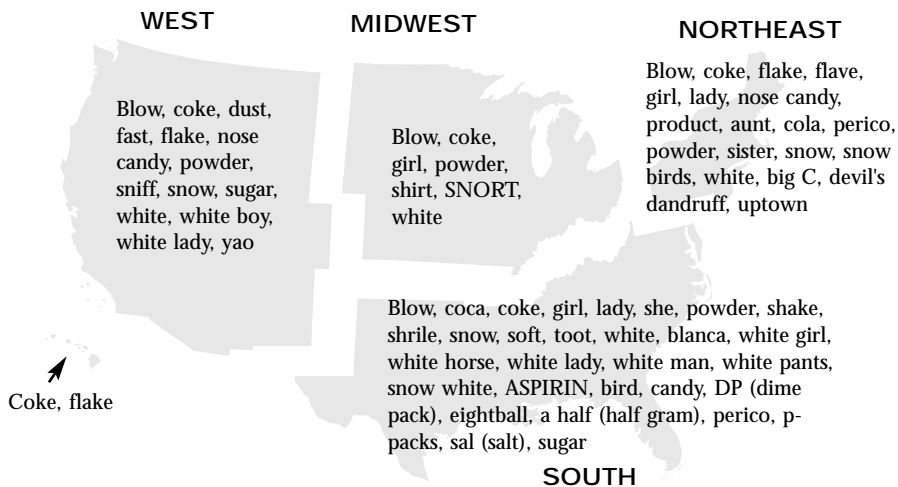
What are the prices and purity levels of powder cocaine in 18 *Pulse Check* cities?*

	City/Source	Gram purity	Gram price
Northeast	Boston, MA ^E	NR	\$50
	Boston, MA ^L	50–60%	\$60
	New York, NY ^L	75%	\$28–\$30
	Philadelphia, PA ^L	60–80%	\$120–\$125
	Portland, ME ^{L,E}	40–60%	\$80–\$100
South	Baltimore, MD ^L	NR	\$90–\$100
	Columbia, SC ^L	NR	\$100
	Memphis, TN ^E	NR	\$45–\$100
	New Orleans, LA ^E	NR	\$80–\$150
	Washington, DC ^E	NR	\$50–\$100
	Washington, DC ^L	30–60%	\$100
Midwest	Chicago, IL ^E	NR	\$50–\$100
	Chicago, IL ^L	NR	\$125
	Detroit, MI ^{L,E}	NR	\$75–\$125
	St. Louis, MO ^E	77%	\$100–\$125
	Sioux Falls, SD ^L	NR	\$100
West	Billings, MT ^L	50–70%	\$100
	Denver, CO ^{L,E}	30–90%	\$100–\$125
	Honolulu, HI ^{L,E}	NR	\$100–\$125
	Los Angeles, CA ^L	80%	\$100
	Seattle, WA ^E	57–68%	\$35–\$50
	Seattle, WA ^L	57–68%	\$80–\$100

*Sources in El Paso and Miami did not provide this information.
NR=Not reported

Exhibit 4.

How is powder cocaine referred to in the four regions of the country?*



*Names in all caps are new this reporting period.

Sources: Law enforcement, epidemiologic/ethnographic, and treatment respondents

not typically use it. As reported in past *Pulse Checks*, young adults (18–30 years) are almost exclusively the sellers of the drug, with few exceptions. Adolescents and young adults sell powder cocaine in Chicago^E and Los Angeles^{L,E}; adults (> 30 years) and young adults sell the drug in Boston^L, Chicago^L, El Paso^L, and Portland^L; and adults sell it in El Paso^E. Only one change in seller characteristics is noted since the last reporting period: in Portland^L, powder cocaine sellers are increasingly organized and are selling greater quantities of the drug.

Similar to percentages for heroin and crack cocaine, according to law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources, powder cocaine sellers often use the drug: about one-third report them as very likely to use the drug, and about half (a much higher percentage than for heroin at 30 percent or crack at 31 percent) report them as somewhat likely to use the drug (see *Highlights Exhibit 8*).

What other drugs do powder cocaine dealers sell? More often than not, law enforcement and epidemiologic respondents report that powder cocaine dealers sell other drugs, with 10 of 27 respondents reporting no other drugs sold by powder cocaine dealers. The most common other drug sold is marijuana, followed by crack, heroin, and methamphetamine. In Columbia (SC)^L crack and marijuana are sold by powder cocaine dealers in the streets, but ecstasy is sold by powder cocaine dealers in nightclubs. Sources report no changes in other drugs sold since the last reporting period.

What types of crimes are related to powder cocaine sales? Powder cocaine dealers are often involved in violent crimes, such as assaults in New York, robbery and theft in Memphis, home invasions in Miami, and street robberies in Los Angeles. Nonviolent crimes include auto thefts, break-ins, and larceny in Columbia (SC); burglaries in El Paso,

Los Angeles, and Billings; transporting illegal aliens in El Paso; and money laundering in Miami. Law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources also mention domestic violence and prostitution as crimes in which powder cocaine sellers are often involved.

Where are powder cocaine markets located? Unlike heroin and crack cocaine sales, which are conducted primarily in central city areas, powder cocaine sales are more evenly distributed among geographic areas. For example, law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources in nine cities list all areas (central city, rural, and suburban) as locations equally likely to have powder cocaine markets. Similarly, both indoor and outdoor sales are equally common, according to sources in the majority of cities (13 of 20). Similar to crack sales settings, streets, private residences, and public housing developments are the oft-mentioned powder cocaine settings. Unlike crack sales settings, nightclubs and bars are often mentioned as powder cocaine settings (by 17 of 20 law enforcement sources), as are raves and concerts (by 8 of 20 law enforcement sources).

Several new powder cocaine sales settings are reported (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)...

- **Miami, FL^L**: The Internet is now used as a communication tool for powder cocaine sales.
- **New Orleans, LA^E**: Sales locations have expanded to include settings other than public housing projects.
- **Philadelphia, PA^L**: Sales have moved indoors.
- **Portland, ME^E**: Settings now include private parties and hotel or motels.



POWDER COCAINE: USERS

How many powder cocaine users are in treatment? (*Exhibit 5*) Primary powder cocaine users constitute 10 percent or more of treatment clients in five cities (Boston, Chicago, El Paso, Miami, and Sioux Falls), compared with 11 cities for crack clients (*see Crack Exhibit 5*). The largest proportion, by far, of powder cocaine clients is in Sioux Falls at 58 percent. Between fall 2001 and spring 2002, proportions of powder cocaine users remained relatively stable among treatment clients in most cities, with several exceptions: increases are reported in six cities, and declines are reported in three, as shown in the arrows below.

Exhibit 5.
How has the number of powder cocaine users changed (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)?



Who uses powder cocaine?

Powder cocaine users are predominantly adult (> 30 years) White males, who live in central city areas. Although most epidemiologic/ethnographic and treatment sources agree that powder cocaine users are predominantly adults, variations are reported: 14 of 45 respondents report young adults (18–30 years) as the predominant powder cocaine users, 3 report adolescents (13–18 years) and young adults

Few changes are reported in user characteristics for powder cocaine (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)...

Age distribution changes:

- **Billings, MT^N:** The number of young adult (18–30 years) users increased slightly.
- **Sioux Falls, SD^{E,N}:** The epidemiologic/ethnographic source reports that the new group of powder cocaine users is increasingly younger. The non-methadone treatment source adds that preadolescents and adolescents have increased since the last reporting period.

Gender distribution changes:

- **Columbia, SC^N:** Female use is increasing.
- **Memphis, TN^E:** Male use is increasing

Race/ethnicity distribution changes:

- **Denver, CO^E; Miami, FL^M; and Sioux Falls, SD^E:** Hispanics increased as powder cocaine users (especially younger Hispanics in Miami).

as the predominant age groups, and 2 report adolescents as the predominant group. Similarly, although males are most often reported as the predominant gender of powder cocaine users (by 26 of 45 respondents), 17 respondents report that the genders are evenly split, and 2 report that females predominate. Most respondents (21 of 45) report Whites as predominant users, but Blacks predominate according to 11 respondents, Hispanics predominate according to 4 respondents (in El Paso, Los Angeles, and New York), and Blacks and Hispanics predominate according to the non-methadone sources in Miami and New York.

How do users take powder cocaine, and what other drugs do they take? Snorting remains the most common administration route. However, seven respondents (mostly methadone treatment sources who identify powder cocaine as used in combination with heroin) list injecting as the primary route of administration. Several epidemiologic/ethnographic and treatment respondents list a variety of routes as common: snorting and injecting are equally common in

Billings^N and El Paso^M; snorting and smoking are equally common in Boston^E and Miami^M; and snorting, smoking, and injecting are equally common in Sioux Falls^N.

Heroin taken in combination with powder cocaine as a “speedball” remains common in many cities across the Nation (particularly among methadone treatment clients), including Baltimore^E, Boston^{E,M}, Chicago^{E,M,N}, Denver^{E,N}, El Paso^M, Los Angeles^M, Memphis^E, Miami^{E,M}, New York^{E,M}, Philadelphia^E, Portland (ME)^E, St. Louis^M, Seattle^M, and Washington, DC^E.

Marijuana also remains commonly taken with powder cocaine, either in combination as a cocaine-laced blunt or joint (“primo” or “tio” in El Paso, “cocoa puff” in Honolulu, and “primo” or “p-dog” in Los Angeles) or sequentially.

Prescription drugs, such as benzodiazepines or opioids, continue to be used in combination or sequentially with powder cocaine in several cities: Boston, Memphis (alprazolam [Xanax[®]] or hydromorphone [Dilaudid[®]]), New York, Philadelphia, Portland, and St. Louis (diazepam).



Sources identify several changes in the route of powder cocaine use (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)...

- **El Paso, TX^M:** Powder cocaine users increasingly mix snorting and injecting as their preferred route of administration.
- **Seattle, WA^E:** Anal use of the drug is a new phenomenon.
- **Sioux Falls, SD^N:** Injecting the drug has increased.

Club drugs, such as ecstasy, are used in combination or sequentially with powder cocaine in Miami (to “bump up”), Portland (ME), and Seattle.

Where is powder cocaine used? As reported in previous *Pulse Checks*, powder cocaine tends to be used indoors, in private, and in small groups among friends. Private residences are the most common use settings, followed by private parties, nightclubs and bars, cars, and streets.

No changes are reported since fall 2001, but unusual use settings include boats in Portland (ME) and parking lots around supermarkets, strip malls, and convenience stores (for sales and use) in Miami.

From powder to crack...

- **Memphis, TN^N:** Powder cocaine users tend to start out with powder cocaine in their youth. They then advance to crack in adulthood.



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